

# Public Pleasure Grounds

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**N**OT many years ago, public parks were looked upon as expensive and unattainable luxuries, and not to be seriously considered by the average city. Now, about three-fourths of our cities with populations greater than 25,000, have parks, and eighty have park areas varying from 50,000 to 70,000 acres. We seem to have reached a point in the administration of municipal affairs where liberal expenditures for the purchase and improvement of park lands is not only considered proper, but demanded in the interest of the public welfare. But there are still many cities with park areas entirely inadequate even for the present. Rapidly growing towns have permitted hundreds of acres to be thickly built upon, making no provision for open spaces to be reserved as pleasure and recreation grounds. Small, interior parks are therefore practically impossible in such sections, as the cost of securing large blocks of improved property would be greater than most municipalities are able to incur. But in a large number of cities there are still open spaces adjoining closely built up sections that can be obtained at reasonable cost. These should be secured at once for public pleasure grounds, even though funds for their improvement may not be available at the time.

Any municipality which neglects such opportunities makes a serious and irretrievable mistake. There ought to be in every city a public sentiment strong enough to demand and secure action in this line; city officials generally act promptly when there is a popular and vigorous demand for anything that promises to better the condition of the masses.

It is no longer a debated question as to the need of these large open areas liberally scattered throughout all cities. They mean

better morals, and better health, and more legitimate pleasure, and these convenient pleasure grounds will certainly be provided—if not now, they will be later, but at much greater cost. Convincing lessons show what these smaller parks have done for the poorer and overcrowded parts of New York and other large cities. In the vicinity of these recently opened spaces of respectable rookeries have quickly disappeared, sanitary conditions have rapidly been improved, vice and crime have been lessened and the condition of the entire population has been affected for the better. All this is the first importance. But it also is a clearly demonstrated fact in very many cities that the creation of large or small public parks has been wise from a financial point of view. Invariably, and necessarily, the value of real estate in the neighborhood of newly opened and completed parks steadily increase. In two-thirds of the cities where there are public pleasure grounds, the records show that improved and unimproved property in the vicinity of the parks has increased in assessed valuation far beyond the average increase in other parts of the cities. In Boston, near the "Back Bay" system of parks, the increase during the last few years has been over 300 per cent; during the same time land values in the rest of the city have risen but 18 per cent. Real estate has risen enormously in value near Central and other New York parks, and everywhere, as parks are developed and become more attractive, the same conditions must exist and the same results will be obtained.

Where park systems are still in a rough and unfinished state some years may be necessary to show their value in this direction. There is no danger that growing cities are likely to get more park lands than they will eventually need. When municipalities neglect to acquire park

lands, or to add to those already improved, the work might well be taken up by the men who have been giving magnificent sums to colleges, hospitals, libraries and other public institutions. Can they find a broader, a more practical way of giving their millions to the masses, who, next to food, shelter and clothing, need fresh air and sunshine, and the rest to body and mind that public pleasure grounds furnish? Very few cities have received such gifts and not more than twelve have been given large tracts for park purposes. The making of these public parks is an especially worthy cause, because they have to do with the entire community, in every city, who really desires to give wisely as well as generously. Let them remember that in this way they are building for posterity, and that their gifts steadily increase in beauty and usefulness.

Experience has shown that the administration of public parks should be entrusted to permanent commissions and that nothing should be done until a competent landscape gardener has been employed and has advised as to selection of land and completed his design. This having been accepted, the plans and detailed specifications for construction and embellishment ought to be carried out under a skilled park superintendent and engineer who will intelligently and conscientiously develop and carry to completion the work entrusted to him. With a superintendent who has been appointed because of his special fitness, and who is supported by a board which persistently adheres to the plans prepared by their professional adviser, the work of constructing and improving public parks will always be satisfactory. Nearly all of the park systems of this country are under strictly nonpartisan boards; this has insured the application of strict business

principles, and thorough, intelligent administration.

In ten of our largest cities that have fine park systems controlled by independent commissions, the annual tax rate on \$1,000 for park improvement and maintenance has been, for the last few years, only 30 cents. The cost of developing and maintaining large urban parks where rolling meadows and woodland and all natural scenery has been preserved and perfected is much less than for those that are more pretentious and artificial. And these parks are best adapted to the wants of those who seek relief from the noise and vitiated air, and the overwork in the crowded cities. More than half the population of this country is now in our cities, and in a few years the proportion will be much greater. Clearly, we must bring the country to the town, as far as possible. The people should not be obliged to go far in any direction to reach the public pleasure grounds. We cannot afford to be niggardly in this direction. Public parks have special functions to perform which are as clearly defined as those of our public schools, public libraries, public baths and other branches of our municipal governments that are considered essential to the welfare of the whole people.

The public pleasure grounds of this country are equaled in beauty and extent by only a few of the more famous parks of Europe. But our park area is still too small, and entirely inadequate for the wants of our cities. There should be an earnest and continued effort made by all lovers of nature, and those who are constantly trying to better the condition of the masses, to arouse a public sentiment in favor of more public pleasure grounds and more money to preserve and beautify them.

## Will Mankind Perish by Fire or Ice?

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**T**HIS comet and the end of the world! Like blossom and flower, they belong to each other in the mind of man.

By basing deduction on astronomical figures that are strictly exact, it is possible to deduce that in the last 2,000 years alone 250,000 comets have traversed our solar system.

We know, too, that our earth has passed through what were remnants, at least, of comet swarms even in our own day.

From this we should have to conclude that the danger of a collision between earth and comet does indeed hang over us like a sword of Damocles.

But let us consider the matter in the light of another solidly founded science.

We can count at least 5,000 years for the history of our human species in the sense of a history of culture. These 5,000 years are only a tiny fraction of the time during which man has existed on the earth. And again, this greater period of time is insignificant when compared with the tremendous lengths of time during which animal and plant life developed on the earth before the creature man was even possible.

There is a drastic way to show the wonderful contrast between the millions of years of world-history and the few thousands of years of man-history.

Suppose that the millions of years since the world began were represented by one day of twenty-four hours. In that one day the primordial history of the world would occupy twelve and one-half hours, from midnight until 12:30 noon. The following epoch, during which the present coal-layers were green forests and the fish developed themselves to lizard-fish, salamanders and lizards, takes up the succeeding eight hours and five minutes—till about 8:30 in the evening. Then come the ichthyosaurs. Their history occupies up to 12:15 at night.

Now we have left only three-quarters of an hour. That time, with the exception of only two minutes, is occupied by the development of the tertiary world—the world of the monster mammals. And the two minutes that are left—they are the time of the whole life of the creature man from the glacial epoch until now. And only the last six thousand years are a history of civilized man—in other words, the last five seconds of those last two minutes.

Let us apply this to the question of the terrible comet.

In those "five seconds" comets have passed through the path of the earth at least 500 times; in our whole solar system there were, no doubt, hundreds of thousands, perhaps as many as 7,500,000. Now calculate; so many in five seconds means how many in twenty-four hours?

One gets a new idea of the heavens.

And yet in all those twenty-four hours—our hundred millions of years—there has not been a serious collision between the earth and any meteor. Never have there been devastating catastrophes on this planet. Never has the steady evolution of life on earth been interrupted. Never could the thread have been torn between the oldest, primeval bacillus and the man of today. Had it been otherwise, man could not be here now. Not the faintest vestige

in all the geological layers of those almost endless epochs hints at the wild fall of anything from the sky or at rude encroachments on the chemical substance of our atmosphere.

This permits only two conclusions. In the millions of years during which comets swarmed through the planetary system by millions and more millions, there either has never been a grave collision between earth and comet or the earth has passed through so many hundreds of thousands of comet tails, comet heads, comet parts of every kind—and they puffed themselves into harmless "star showers" on striking our atmosphere.

In either case there appears to be nothing in the scare about comets. If the planets appear as the big, protected children of the sun, the comets are like gaudy soap bubbles that play around the children's heads. Who is afraid to run into a soap bubble with his hard head?

But suppose the sun were some day to eat her child, the earth.

Suppose the flight of the earth were to lessen. Immediately the attraction of the sun would become predominant. The earth's path would change from a circle to a spiral. The great power would pull the little planet to its heart. A shock—and the earth planet goes up in steam, turns into flaming gases. The sun, which—perhaps—gave birth to the world uncounted millions of years ago, has taken it back. An awful mystery play!

Or: Some day the sun becomes dark.

Not at the result of a harmless eclipse. Its spots have been growing alarmingly. In that day the veil will not lift at all. A cold ring has formed over the hissing hearth of the giant.

Then, to the eyes of a distant observer on some fixed star, a star will have died. But 90,000,000 miles from that star something else has died—the life of the earth. Polar cold spins itself around the globe. The last power of blossoming by the help of light vanishes in the last plant cell.

Helplessly dance the northern lights, helplessly the light of phosphorescent creatures illuminates the sea for the last time. The oceans freeze solid. Water and life, the inseparable allies, die together. With the last drop of H<sub>2</sub>O, the great sunflower of earth, life, disappears.

Is this to be the final catastrophe? The threads do, indeed, weave themselves very closely together here.

The planet spheres are preserved only by their monstrous speed in their race around the sun from falling headlong into its open fire sea. They are lost in that instant in which any cause arises to hem their desperate flight. It may be a very tiny cause. It may develop very, very slowly through millions of years. What are millions of years compared with eternity? If the cause is there at all the hour of reckoning will come and no power of heaven or earth can stop it.

And the cause exists.

The space through which the planet darts is not absolutely empty.

Dust, meteoric dust, the finest of meteoric mass, the thinnest of comet stuff, drifts ceaselessly against the planets in their path.

Well, then: A lightning express train whizzes along. Swarms of gnats strike it

and are hurled away. Now and then a caterpillar or a bug gets on the rail and is smashed into nothing. How could they check the train?

But let the lightning express whiz thus for millions, billions, trillions of years. Time is a terrible, inexorable accountant. It has built skyscraper mountains out of microscopic kernels of sand; it has burst those mountains again with the falling drops of water, sent downward year after year through thousands of years.

The endless, limitless swarms of gnats will bring the lightning express to a stop as if with an emergency brake when its hour has come.

The meteoric dust, perhaps in a still longer period, even the ether of light itself, will gradually check the course of the planet. Long before that course has been stopped entirely the planet will have fallen into the sun and has disappeared as a flickering metallic flame. For as soon as its race has slowed down, even a little, gravity pounces on it with vulture's talons and tears it toward the sun. Its path becomes a spiral until at last, Ikarus, it dives, itself only a colossal falling star, into this sun that has already drunk up so many little meteoric swarms with its flaming kiss.

Now a second possibility.

I throw a piece of white hot iron into the snow of winter. The snow hisses, melts, vanishes in steam in a big circle around it. But the winter remains. The frosty night rules undisturbed. At first the hot iron has conquered the cold in a few seconds, as in play. Now the frost settles on the iron, hour after hour, days, weeks. And it masters the iron completely, till it is cold to its heart like the snow.

The sun is such a piece of iron.

Today it throws its flaming rays out with such might that the deserts of earth 90,000,000 of miles away scorch the naked foot. A little shift of the earth's axis, that will bring the ice of the pole under equatorial sun, and all the ice would flow in melted water like the snow around our hot lump of iron.

In twilight of imagination we can surmise something beyond our own chain of life. A mighty course of events was necessary to develop at all that which we know now as "life."

We do not know what "life" really is. Perhaps its elements and properties are properties of cosmic matter itself.

At any rate, the first cell-formation was an evolutionary achievement of the first rank. The first life manifested itself in a form that was, doubtless the best adapted to the temperature of the earth at that time. But the conditions that led to that formation of the first "life" must themselves have developed much earlier. And, before that the earth was probably red hot like the sun today. We cannot conceive that the protoplasm known to us, and of which the animal and vegetable cell consists today, could have lived in that fire period. Yet its origin must absolutely have been in that time.

The whole beginning of time primeval thus becomes part of our chain. Now it may be that the glowing earth was a piece of the sun, left behind by it as a ring when the sun shrank, and finally whirled together into a sphere. Hence our story of

life may lead us back into the sun itself. And the sun was a part of the primeval mists from which the systems of the milky way sprang. So we look back to our home in the milk way, and thence into the infinity of cosmos.

I think, then, that when we look clearly at those things of the past we approach the matter of the world-end in a manner quite different from that which is usual to humanity.

But over this gigantic metallic lump of our planetary system there rests the remorseless frost-night, everlasting. Let us assume that the space of universe has a temperature of only 50 degrees below zero. Its cold certainly is not less than that. In that unchanging ice-bath the sun must inevitably burn out some day and become cold to its very heart, like our lump of iron.

"The day will come" which will be no Day but the end of the Sun-days. Baldr's reign will be done.

These astronomical reasonings about the sun's dying have something that differentiates them decisively from other conceptions of the end of the world. They lack the element of suddenness, unexpectedness, the accidental. We see an end that approaches slowly, in the course only of inconceivably many millions of years.

And in this slow, logical, orderly process we see a great indication—that this coming end is not to be called an end, but is, in truth, only a great, wonderful step in the course of evolution!

From the primal cell to the primordial plant, from the plant to the first animal, from animal to animal, it all follows like the rings in the tree that shows its successive years. And at last man fights himself upward from it all. Our ancestors of the glacial period, who hunted the mammoth, stood barely as high in culture as the Eskimo stands today. And yet "we" developed from them, "we" in the electric glows of Twentieth Century, with our poetry and ethics—the Eskimo who has become Shakespeare and Goethe.

The natural philosopher deduces the unknown from the known.

Nothing can hinder him from seeing in this act of man-development only one act of a development that includes the whole universe. The evolution of man has a cosmic significance.

Throughout the whole immensity of time there must have flowed an unbroken course of events, only one part of which was the development of ourselves. It is entirely impossible that this course could have been broken even for a second in all that time, for if it had the results would have been impossible.

That chain of development that led to humanity has withstood the enormous changes that made fixed stars out of the etheric mist; it has withstood the tremendous shock of the fragmenting of such a fixed star into pieces that became planets; it has withstood the formation of an earth out of a fiery mass; on that slowly cooling globe it has created one wondrous shape after another, from the first cell to man.

Now we hear that in further millions of years—we can say billions with perfect

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